



# NATCA INSIDER

## NATCA Member Uses Everyday Inspiration to Create Music and Music Videos

Friday, October 11, 2013

Combining a love of air traffic control and passion for music may seem like an impossible task, but NATCA Pensacola (PNS) member Mark Rossmore has perfected the combination in his recently released music video “Aerodrome.” Rossmore has been an air traffic controller and NATCA member at Pensacola Tower since 2007 and a musician since 1995. While travelling to Hawaii earlier this year, Rossmore found musical inspiration in the everyday mechanics of the aviation industry.

“The elements of music and rhythm are all around us if one is willing to take notice,” Rossmore explained. “An airport environment is the same way. It’s a constant dance of machines and people, repeated a thousand times an hour at airports around the world, that has to keep a certain rhythm in order for everything to go smoothly.”

After his trip, Rossmore released a six-song extended play based on his experience. The first song and music video, “Aerodrome” is a timelapse he compiled from the many different aircraft he flew on during the 9,000-mile roundtrip from Miami.

“An airplane lands,” said Rossmore. “The gate slides into place. Luggage and people exit. Pilots get their clearance to depart. Gas, luggage, and people fill the plane back up. Pilots call for taxi. Airplane departs. Repeat a short time later at its next destination. So, the song and video were created to convey that ebb and flow of tech and humanity. Plus, timelapses are just cool!”

The NATCA Insider discussed Rossmore’s music with him to learn more about his passion.

**Insider: What instruments do you play? Are there any others you’d like to learn?**

**Rossmore:** I experiment with a lot of different instruments. I started playing bass guitar about 18 years ago, which led me to the electric guitar. I eventually got involved with synthesizers and MIDI sequencing. I love creating new sounds from scratch, sampling different instruments and objects, running them through effects, tweaking them until I’ve arrived at something that sounds nothing like the original sound source. I also enjoy traditional and world music, and blending them with rock and electronic music. I’ve got a whole collection of organic instruments now: hand drums, flutes and shakers. I tend to pick up instruments as I need them for specific songs and learn them until I feel confident enough to record with them.

My latest love is the ukulele. In fact, my newest Escape the Clouds EP [Travels 01/Moments](#), just released this August, mixes electronic music with ukes. A lot of people only associate the uke with gentle Hawaiian music and “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” I wanted to take it somewhere out of the ordinary.

If there was one instrument I’d love to learn, it would be the cello. It’s my favorite classical instrument because it conveys as much emotion and drama as the human voice.

**Insider: When did you begin writing songs and putting together music videos?**

**Rossmore:** I did some writing in my old rock bands and other projects from the 90's until the mid-2000's. However, I didn't really find my focus until 2007 when I was in Oklahoma City for the initial FAA tower training. My wife had stayed back in Miami to wrap up things for our move to Pensacola, so I had two months to myself. I'd brought my guitar, a keyboard, some headphones and my laptop with me.

In between studying ATC and getting to know my newfound friends from my tower class, I fully produced five songs. They each made it on to my first, all-instrumental album, *Bring the Rain*, which came out in 2009.

In 2010, I put out my second album, *Circumnavigator*. It's there where I really solidified my style. The music is a blend of world, industrial and electronic genres. I also wrote lyrics and recorded vocals for the first time, with half the album's tracks featuring spoken word or sung vocals. My goal was for each song to tell a story, whether through the lyrics or through the instrumentals.

*Until the End*, my third album—released in 2011—continued that narrative trend, as did the two EPs I just released now in August 2013. My first music video was “*Every Storm has an End*,” which came out in 2010, based on my instrumental “*Above the Overcast*.” The song is about an airship surviving a storm. I was inspired by movies like *300* which were filmed entirely against a green screen, and thought, “Hey, I'd like to give that a shot.” So I bought \$25 worth of green fabric, duct-taped it to a pair of bookcases and made my own little green screen in my guest bedroom. I spent a month of weekends shooting, and another month or so editing and creating the visual effects. It was a fun experiment!

**Insider: How did you learn the mechanics of music video production?**

**Rossmore:** Before I joined the FAA in 2007, I was the owner and creative director of a web design firm. When you run your own business, where your month-to-month income is always a question mark, and a client asks, “Can you do this for me?” one tends to say “Sure!” first and then figure out what's involved later. I had a lot of clients that were interested in videos for their businesses, so I taught myself to produce, shoot and edit video. In the last two months alone before I joined the FAA, I shot and edited six different corporate videos.

I never had any formal education in video production. Instead, I learned it all on the fly, in a real-world working environment. For my *Escape the Clouds* music videos, I shot and edited everything entirely on my own. My equipment is a budget Canon DSLR, a couple of inexpensive lenses, a battery-powered video monitor, a tripod, a couple of cheap lights and a little wireless remote. It takes some trial and error, since I need to be both in front and behind the camera—hence the need for the monitor and remote—but in the end, I have something that I can say I really created from scratch.

With each music video I shoot, I try to expand my knowledgebase. For example, for my “*Until the End*” video, I wanted to shoot in an actual outdoor environment, so I filmed most of it around a local 19th century fort, Fort Pickens. I spent six days in the sand and the wind filming, and also took a ride in a WWII Stearman biplane owned by a local pilot.

**Insider: How do you find inspiration for your music and videos?**

**Rossmore:** World history is a big inspiration. I'm also a huge fan of steampunk, which is essentially an alternative, science fiction spin on 19th century/early 20th century history (think H.G. Wells and Jules Verne). There is so much drama and action to be found in the real time period. Now, toss in fictional airships, giant steam-powered robots, neat clockwork gadgetry, and you've got some cool ideas floating around.

A lot of my music is based on real historical events, sometimes given a steampunk spin. For instance, the song "Hunting the Future" on my CD [Circumnavigator](#) was inspired by the Native American struggle against Westward Expansion. "Steam-powered Samurai," off the same album, is a steampunk retelling of the Japanese Boshin War.

I also tackle a lot of social issues that were around in the 19th century and continue to impact our world today. On my third album, [Until the End](#), my song "The Surgeon's Widow" addresses the issue of women's rights through the lens of the Jack the Ripper killings. "The Sins of the Godly" and "Lady in Waiting" deal with religious issues. "Little Revolutions" was inspired by the modern day Tank Man of Tiananmen Square.

It's not all serious, though. There are fun songs, like "One Bullet" about an aerial hitman, and "Louisiana Sunrise" about a vampire hunter who gets the tables turned on him.

I'm also an aviation buff, who grew up in an airline family. Aviation concepts inspire a lot of my more energetic songs, such as "Steampunk Dogfight" and "The Air Race." The latter in turn inspired a music video I shot from the back seat of a local pilot's Yak-52 as we did some mock dogfighting and formation work over Pensacola Beach.

**Insider: What makes it fun and keeps you motivated?**

**Rossmore:** The challenge! I love coming up with these weird ideas and figuring out how to make them come to life. Music as a whole makes life better. That's the whole reason behind the name "Escape the Clouds." Whenever I've faced hardship, listening to and creating music has always helped me get through it. My biggest outside motivator is the response I get from fans around the world. Some are writers who like to put on my stuff in the background while they craft a story. Others are dancers who choreograph solos to my instrumentals. For a creative person, there is no greater or more humbling compliment than finding out your art helped inspire someone else's art. It's a terrific feeling.

**Insider: If you could collaborate or work with someone in the future, who would it be and why?**

**Rossmore:** Oh man! I'd be happy to just sit in the same room with Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor. I'd just shut up and watch the dude make his music. I'd also love to work with cellist Tina Guo. She's performed on a lot of Hans Zimmer's soundtracks, Bear McCreary's *Battlestar Galactica* soundtrack and with Cirque du Soleil.

**For more information about Rossmore and his music, please visit the following websites.**

**Easiest way to listen and purchase the music:** <http://EscapeTheClouds.bandcamp.com>

**Official Site:** <http://www.EscapeTheClouds.com>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/escapetheclouds>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/EscapeTheClouds>